

RockPointe Small Groups

Judges and Kings • Saul: Israel's First King • 1 Samuel 8-15 • 09/29/2019

Main Point

Israel did not trust God's leadership and instead desired an earthly king. God answered this request but Saul failed to lead in a way that honored God.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do we ever settle for good choices when the best choices are still out there? Explain. Have you ever made a choice you thought was right, only to find out later it was not the best choice?

How does what other people possess affect what you want? Do you think having these things just because someone else has them is best for you? Why or why not?

In 1 Samuel, Israel requested a king—a request rooted in their desire to be like their neighboring (pagan) nations. This request revealed their lack of trust in God's leadership, a theme that continued throughout Saul's life. Saul's life is a sad story of unrealized potential, but it's an important reminder of God's desire that we trust Him and His plans for our lives, and that we live fully devoted to Him.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 8:1-9.

What reasons did Israel's elders give in their request for a king (vv. 4-5, see also 19-20)? What was their real reason, according to verse 7? What was wrong with their desire to have a king?

How did Samuel respond to the elders? What is the key difference between Samuel's response to the elders and the elders's response to their situation?

These elders wanted a king who would provide military leadership and make the nation's

borders secure. Furthermore the leaders apparently held the misconception that a king was less susceptible to corruption. The elders, however, chose to address one wrong with another wrong. There was no praying and seeking of the Lord. There was no solemn assembly—no crying out to God. The elders simply demanded that Samuel appoint a king to judge them “the same as all the other nations have” (1 Sam. 8:5). Their motives may appear commendable, logical, and timely. The trouble was that Israel was to be different from all the rest of the nations (Lev. 20:26; Num. 23:9). This fact was a fundamental principle of the Torah. God, and God alone, was Israel’s King (Ex. 15:18; Pss. 10:16; 24:10; 93:1).

HAVE A FEW VOLUNTEERS READ 1 SAMUEL 9:1-2; 9:14-17; 9:25-27; AND 10:1.

What was God’s purpose for the future king (9:16)? What does this say about God’s character? How does this affect our trust in God?

What was the significance of Samuel’s private anointing of Saul (10:1)? How do you think Saul felt when Samuel anointed him?

Samuel’s “message from God” first took the form of anointing, an action heretofore reserved for sacred objects and Aaronic priests. The act of pouring a flask of specially prepared olive oil on Saul’s head apparently symbolized the staking of a divine claim on him, as well as the outpouring of the Lord’s enabling Spirit into the newly designated king. Though Samuel anointed Saul, it was, in fact, the Lord who was responsible for designating Saul as the leader “over his inheritance” (v. 1). Though God desires for us to choose the best and trust Him in those choices, He doesn’t abandon us when we make a less than best choice. Though the Israelites had sinned, God was still providing for them.

Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 13:1-15.

Where was Saul’s focus when he went ahead with giving up burnt offerings and sacrifices on his own? What caused him to lose patience?

What does impatience reveal about our hearts? What does it communicate about our relationship with God?

Samuel had instructed Saul, by the Word of the Lord, to wait at Gilgal until Samuel arrived to offer sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the Israelite army. Saul’s focus was not on the Lord, but on the present circumstances of his life. Instead of responding to the Israelite’s desertion by patiently trusting the Lord, Saul took matters into his own hands. Saul fell prey to his own pride and offered sacrifices he was not authorized to make.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 15:1-35.

How clear were God’s instructions to Saul through Samuel?

What did King Saul do right in these verses? What did he do wrong?

What lessons should you and I draw from Saul’s example and God’s and Samuel’s reactions?

Samuel was quite clear with Saul—there is no sacrifice we can offer God that outweighs or substitutes our obedience to Him. We have no skill, ability, or resource that God needs. Why, then, would we ever think that offering Him that which He doesn’t need could in any way make up for withholding from Him that which He wants—our obedience? In response, Saul confessed his sin twice (vv. 24,30), but we have no evidence that he repented of the sin. The remainder of the biblical account of Saul shows him either being ineffective or attempting to kill David, his God-anointed successor. Had he repented, the Bible is clear that God offers forgiveness and cleansing (Isa. 1:18; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How are we tempted to be like Israel and not trust God’s leadership in our lives?

When was a time you “took things into your own hands” but later realized the foolishness of doing so?

How might you share with others about the good leadership of King Jesus using this story from 1 Samuel?

Pray

Close in prayer thanking God for His leadership in our lives. Ask Him for further trust in Him and the obedience to live according to His Word.

Commentary

| 1 Samuel 8-15

Israel’s disappointment with the priesthood of Eli and the sin of Samuel’s sons led Israel to turn to a new form of leadership. The people, following the example of the nations around

them, demanded a king (1 Sam. 8). God granted their desires, and Samuel reluctantly appointed a king. Saul's reign had a promising beginning. King Saul, however, proved unlike Samuel because he did not listen to the word of the Lord. The Lord thus rejected Saul as He had the house of Eli.

God Permits a King (8:1-22). The people requested a king because Samuel's judgeship had begun to fail. He was old; and his sons, like Eli's, were wicked men who perverted justice. Also the people wanted the benefits of a central authority like the other nations had. Although Samuel resisted, God graciously permitted Israel to have a king. Samuel warned the people of the troubles of kingship, but they persisted; so God granted their request.

God Reveals Israel's King (9:1-27). A Benjamite named Saul searched with his servant for the lost donkeys of his father, Kish. Saul's servant knew of Samuel, the prophet of God. They sought him to inquire of God where they might find the donkeys. On the previous day God had informed Samuel that he would meet a man from Benjamin whom he should anoint king over Israel. God reserved the right to choose Israel's king (Deut. 17:15). Saul remained with Samuel to attend a sacrificial feast. The next day Samuel detained him to receive a message from God.

Saul Anointed (10:1-27). The message was that God had chosen Saul to be king over Israel. Samuel anointed him with a flask of oil, indicating the special relationship between God and king (see Deut. 17:15). Because of this custom, the king of Israel became known as the "anointed one" (Messiah). Three signs followed the anointing to confirm to Saul that God had indeed chosen him. Saul sought after lost donkeys, but he discovered a kingdom.

Samuel anointed Saul again but this time publicly at Mizpah. The people found Saul hiding among the baggage, and they hailed him king. They longed for a king to rival the nations; ironically, they were elated with a shy keeper of donkeys.

Saul at Jabesh (11:1-15). The first test for Saul's reign was the attack of the Ammonites upon Jabesh Gilead across the Jordan. As in the days when the judges ruled, the Spirit came upon Saul, and he became angry. No longer was Saul shy. By exercising his authority as king, he rallied the Israelites. His forces defeated the Ammonites. This confirmed to the people that Saul was an able king.

Samuel's Final Warning (12:1-25). With the installation of Saul, Samuel retired as Israel's civic leader. His final sermon defended his leadership and reviewed God's favor in the past. He indicted the people's sinful choice of a king because they had set aside the kingship of the Lord. Samuel proved his charge by calling upon God to send a thunderstorm. It came during the dry season of the year (May-June) when a thunderstorm was unexpected. After the

people confessed their sin, Samuel reminded them that they had nothing to fear from God if they continued in the Lord. If they failed to obey the Lord, however, they and their king would be swept away.

Saul's Foolishness (13:1-14:52). Saul's son, Jonathan, bravely initiated a war with the Philistines. However, the troops of Israel feared the numerous Philistines gathered at Michmash.

Saul awaited Samuel for seven days at Gilgal to offer a sacrifice to entreat the Lord's blessing. When Samuel did not come at the appointed time (see 10:8), Saul's army began to defect. Saul acted foolishly because of impatience. Out of desperation, he disobeyed the prophet Samuel's instructions and offered burnt offerings. Samuel arrived and rebuked Saul for his disobedience. Because he acted foolishly, Samuel prophesied that Saul would lose his kingdom. God would choose "a man after his own heart." Samuel's rebuke of Saul set the pattern for future relations between the leaders of God's people—prophets and kings. The future history of Israel and Judah illustrates that their kings disobeyed God's prophets to their own peril.

Although Israel had no weapons and were greatly outmanned, Jonathan courageously attacked the Philistines while Saul waited behind in Gibeah. The Philistines fell into disarray because of an earthquake, and Saul called for the ark to consult the Lord's guidance. Yet after he saw the Philistines panic all the more, he abandoned the inquiry and hurried to attack. In spite of Saul's impulsive actions, God gave them a great victory.

Saul's pride and hasty decision to restrict Israel from eating during the battle jeopardized his armies' strength and his son's life. Saul built an altar and inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him because of his unbelief. By casting lots, Saul discovered that Jonathan had unknowingly broken Saul's ban of eating. The men of the camp refused Saul's order to execute Jonathan, saving him from Saul's foolish oath.

Because of his disobedience, Saul never totally defeated the Philistines. In spite of his sin, God graciously gave him victories and a large family.

Rejection of Saul (15:1-35). Saul's pride and desire for economic gain fueled his continued disobedience. Saul went so far as to build a monument for himself. The Lord "grieved" that he had made Saul king over Israel. The Lord instructed Saul by the prophet Samuel to put to death the Amalekites and all their possessions because of their past sins (see the law of holy war, Deut. 20:16-18). Saul, however, permitted Agag, the Amalekite king, and the best of the spoil to live. The Lord rejected Saul because of his sin, and Samuel wept for him.

When Samuel confronted Saul with his sins, Saul tried to justify his actions by explaining that he wanted to make a sacrifice of the spoil to the Lord. Saul had failed to learn that God does not accept ritual without obedience. Samuel refused to support Saul any longer because God had torn away his kingdom. Samuel himself executed Agag in accordance with the Lord's command. Samuel, as the prophet of God, never advised Saul again (see 19:24; 28:11).